

Dana workers in Pottstown, Pennsylvania expose unsafe conditions

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More and more auto parts workers at Dana Incorporated have written in to the *World Socialist Web Site* to describe the corrupt relations they have witnessed between the United Auto Workers union and their employer.

“We have a lot of concerns about our health and safety, and almost everybody [at my work site] is trying to get a grip on what is happening here,” said a worker from Dana’s facility in Pottstown, Pennsylvania.

The Dana Pottstown facility, located a half-hour drive northwest of Philadelphia, is the company’s oldest in the United States. The location manufactures driveshaft components for light vehicles. In 2019, the facility celebrated its hundredth anniversary in use.

“The whole facility [in Pottstown] is a safety hazard,” the worker said. “The amount of CO₂ in this facility isn’t healthy,” and their ventilation system does not appear to be working. “The pipes in this facility are so old that they are corroding from the inside.”

A recent series of fires at the Dana plant in Warren, Michigan, underscore the dangers that exist. “We had a furnace fire twice in one day last month,” claimed another worker.

With this in mind, it was “only a matter of time” before an industrial accident occurred there similar to the explosion at the R.M. Palmer chocolate factory in nearby Reading in March, the first worker said.

That explosion, which killed seven and injured 20 more, was likely caused by a gas leak, according to a report last month by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). Workers had reported the smell of gas fumes to management, but they were not allowed to leave.

At Dana, the workers can see a “fog” hovering inside the building when its machines are running. They believe it is due to coolant that is leaking. The

Schuylkill River, a major waterway, flows less than a mile from the plant, and the area is criss-crossed with tributaries.

Another worker added that they had done some checking around, and the local industry standard for their job description was \$23 an hour, almost \$5 more than the current roughly \$18 an hour wage on offer to second shift workers at Dana. “This is very discouraging,” they said, adding that on top of this they had to pay union dues.

The worker complained about the corrupt relationship between management and the United Auto Workers representatives at Local 644. “This is not a trade union,” the worker stated emphatically. As far as having their interests represented, the workers “are paying for a service we are not receiving.”

The corruption has developed to grotesque levels, with workers attesting that they have seen union representatives driving brand new vehicles shortly after being elected to nominally represent them. “These are brand new \$75,000 trucks,” a worker explained. “We cannot even afford to pay our bills with the pay Dana gives us,” they said. “These [UAW representatives] are rubbing our noses in [their corruption],” the worker said.

UAW Local 644 is the home of the union’s current Region 9 Director Daniel Vicente. Vicente, who is a member of new president Shawn Fain’s Members United slate, has done nothing for the workers at his old local since taking office in March. Like the majority of UAW members, few workers at the Pottstown facility were even made aware of the union’s national election in which they were entitled to vote. “No one’s saying anything, there’s just more and more posters up, but no one has anything to say about the election,” a worker had told the WSWs.

Despite this union-enforced information blackout, rank-and-file candidate Will Lehman, who ran on an openly socialist platform and demanded the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy and its privileges, won 11 percent of the vote at the local in the first round last year.

The conditions in Dana are pervasive throughout the auto parts industry. Currently, 500 car battery manufacturing workers are on strike in Holland, Ohio, where the UAW is refusing to share information about their strike with their fellow members.

Rather than serving the interests of workers, the bureaucracy acts as a prop for management, helping them to exploit the workers.

Nowhere is this more apparent than at Dana Inc., which workers call a “slave ship.” In August 2021, Dana workers voted by 97 percent to reject a contract which allowed for 80+-hour work weeks and poverty pay. Despite a near-unanimous support for strike action, as well as the extremely favorable conditions for a strike, the UAW and the United Steel Workers kept their members on the job, where they faced management abuse. Eventually, in late 2021, with threats and manipulation from the UAW-USW, the unions forced a second contract offer to be adopted.

During this time, the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee was formed to give a genuine voice to the workers facing this struggle and to unite workers within the industry. The Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee has remained active and has waged a continuous struggle to resist the company’s and union’s abuses. A recent statement declares their determination to “share our personal stories with the working class and to speak for those who are too intimidated to speak up in fear of losing their jobs and livelihoods.”

Since 2021, working conditions have only deteriorated at Dana. In Pottstown, workers have been denied profit sharing from the company, even though their facility has produced above expectations for four years in a row.

A worker explained to the WSWs that non-unionized plants had even allowed their workers to receive profit-sharing “when Dana makes profit globally.” The UAW-enforced contract is less generous, only allowing them to “receive profit share if Dana makes profit in the U.S., not globally.”



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